

The main objectives in the study of foreign languages

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Abstract

The main objective of the study of any language is to be able to communicate, either orally or in writing. But apart from this important goal there are many other aspects to reach. From the curriculum of primary education many achievements are proposed to get, and part of them refer to the learning of a foreign language, in the case of our country, English. The process to acquire a second language is different from learning the mother tongue, and we will analyze different learning strategies to achieve it..

Keywords: Foreign language, learning, objectives, acquisition, strategies

Título: Los objetivos principales en el estudio de lenguas extranjeras.

Resumen

El objetivo primordial del estudio de cualquier idioma es poder comunicarse, ya sea de forma oral o escrita. Pero aparte de esta meta principal hay otros muchos aspectos a los que llegar. Desde el currículo de la educación primaria se plantean numerosos logros a conseguir, y parte de ellos se refieren al aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera, en el caso de nuestro país, el inglés. El proceso para adquirir un segundo idioma es diferente al de aprender la lengua materna, y para ello analizaremos diversas estrategias de aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: Lengua extranjera, aprendizaje, objetivos, adquisición, estrategias.

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is one of the essential columns of human life, the individuals have permanently evolved and advanced in that way, the easier and more accessible the communication, the better this will be for everyone.

Nowadays, through the social networks and the globalization, communication has turned into a worldwide fact, where the most vital component is the language, so today learning languages is not longer a choice, it is a need.

PRIMARY STAGE OVERALL OBJECTIVES

Objectives can be defined as the capacities to be developed by the students. They are the elements that guide the teaching-learning processes, helping teachers in organizing their tasks.

To know and appreciate the values and norms of co-existence, learn to behave accordingly, prepare the children for active citizenship, and respect human rights and pluralism in a democratic society is one of the objectives, and it is related to the knowledge and interaction with the real world and also to the self-autonomy and initiative.

Other of the objectives is to develop individual and team-working habits, effort, responsibility for their work, self-confidence, critical awareness, personal initiative, curiosity interest and creativity in the learning process. It is related to the self-autonomy and initiative.

To acquire habits to prevent and solve conflicts peacefully, which will enable them to act autonomously in the family and in their social groups is other of the objectives.

It is also important to know, understand and respect different cultures and the differences between people, equal rights and opportunities of men and women and non-discrimination towards the disabled. It is related to the learning to learn competence.

Other objective is to know and use the Spanish language and the co-official language of the Autonomous Community properly, and develop reading habits.

Students may also acquire basic communicative competence in at least one foreign language, which enables pupils to express and understand basic messages and interact in everyday situations.

Knowing and valuing natural, social and cultural environments and learn how to look after them is also essential, related to knowing and taking care of the animals which are closest to human life.

Other objective is to develop basic mathematical competences and begin to solve problems requiring elemental arithmetical operations, geometry and calculation and be able to apply them in ordinary situations. To use different artistic expressions and start to create visual designs is also important.

Primary students may also value hygiene and health, accept different physical appearances, respect differences and use physical education and sport as means for personal and social development.

Developing affective capacities in all aspects of personality and relationships, and an attitude against violence, prejudices and sexist stereotypes is other of the aims.

To promote road safety and attitudes of respect, which will influence on the prevention of road accidents is also important.

Finally, to know, to appreciate and to value the physical, linguistic, social and cultural peculiarities of the place where they live is essential too.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES IN THE AREA OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

The general objectives of learning a foreign language in the school context are determined by those established in the official curriculum. Regarding the teaching of English at the primary stage, the objectives that are pursued involve developing a range of linguistic, discursive and strategic skills in children as well as positive attitudes towards other languages and cultures. These objectives are the following ones:

- To listen and to understand oral messages in different verbal situations, using that information to perform specific tasks related to the students' experience.
- To express and to interact verbally in simple situations, using verbal and non-verbal procedures and adopting a respectful and cooperative attitude.
- To write different kinds of texts about general topics with the help of examples.
- To read texts related to their experiences and interests, obtaining general and specific information according to a previous purpose.
- To learn how to use all the resources the student has, including information and communication technologies to obtain information and to communicate in the foreign language.
- To value the foreign and all the languages in general as a mean of communication between people from different countries and cultures, and as a learning tool of different contents.
- To express a receptive and self-confidence attitude in the learning and use of the foreign language.
- To use the previous language knowledge and experiences for a quicker and more efficient acquisition of the foreign one.
- To identify phonetic aspects of rhythm, intonation and accentuation, as well as linguistic structures and lexical aspects of foreign language and to use them as basic elements of communication.

ACQUIRING A SECOND LANGUAGE

There is a big difference between learning a language and acquiring it. All language learners at the primary stage begin by learning the language, but not all acquire it. Therefore the acquisition of a second language refers to the final learning process that allows the student to manage a second language in a similar way as it does with the first.

Studies of the acquisition of a second language have occurred in recent years about understanding how this acquisition process occurs, and whether this process occurs consciously or unconsciously, in order to understand why students reach different levels of knowledge of the second language, and how this affects their communication skills.

Children acquire their mother tongue through a subconscious process. But the acquisition of a foreign language is a learning process that happens most of the time in an environment of academic formation, and that occurs in a place where the language is not used. That means that the acquisition of a second language is a conscious process.

In order to explain this process it is necessary to know in detail those theories that propose and explain how this acquisition process occurs. Several scholars have proposed different theories that one way or another explain from their point of view how this process occurs. One of the most important theories is the Krashen theory, also known as the Theory of the Monitor. According to this theory in the acquisition of a second language, two systems are combined: the first is the acquisition system and the second is the learning system. The acquisition of a language is a subconscious process. Grammatical structures are acquired naturally, while learning is a conscious process, knowing the language through different models and strategies to the acquisition of it.

THE LEARNING STRATEGIES OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

In order to achieve these goals, it is necessary to establish strategies. The strategies in relation to the learning of a foreign language date back to the 60s, as a result of the advances achieved by cognitive psychology, being the main interest to identify what the good students of a foreign language reported what they did to learn it, and in some cases their observation was resorted to during the learning process. The first attempt related to this topic was the work of Aaron Carter "The method of inference in foreign language study".

Subsequently, Tarone defines the learning strategies of a foreign language as an attempt to develop the linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the mother tongue in order to incorporate these into its interlingual competence.

Another definition is given by Rubin in the eighties, he defines learning strategies as those that contribute to the development of the language system that the student constructs and directly affect learning.

O'Malley in the nineties defines strategies such as thoughts or special behaviors that individuals use to help themselves, learn or retain new information.

Finally, the version of R.Oxford turns out to be the most complete at the moment. According to this author, the learning strategies of a language are specific actions, behaviors, steps or techniques that students use to improve their progress in the development of their foreign language skills. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval or use of the new language.

During these last decades as can be seen there has been a change in relation to the concept of learning strategies, starting with those that gave more importance to the result towards the present moment than the most relevant is the process. Although there is no uniformity of concept there are several aspects in common: they are flexible, can be taught, are generated by the student, improve the learning of the language and help develop linguistic competence, include information and memory and allow the student to be more autonomous.

Classification of strategies.

There is a great disparity of criteria when it comes to organizing the different learning strategies of a foreign language. However, there are usually certain coincidences among some authors when establishing three broad classes of strategies: metacognitive, cognitive and resource management.

Metacognitive strategies refer to planning, control and evaluation by students to their own knowledge. Cognitive strategies refer to the integration of new content to the knowledge they already had of their mother tongue.

Finally, resource management strategies are a set of support strategies that include different types of resources that contribute to the resolution of the task, and they are related to the child's motivation and affective disposition towards learning.

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